



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation

of

Mircea Duluș

entitled

**Rhetoric, Exegesis and Florilegic Structure in Philagathos of Cerami:
An Investigation of the *Homilies* and of the
Allegorical Exegesis of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika***

will be held on

Friday, 9 February 2018, at 11:00

in the

**Senate Room – Monument Building
Central European University (CEU)
Nádor u.9, Budapest**

Examination Committee

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Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation offers the first comprehensive analysis of Philagathos of Cerami's œuvre, who flourished during the reigns of Roger II (1130–1154) and William I (1154–1166) in the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. On the one hand, the study addresses Philagathos' collection of sermons, on the other hand, it aimed to revisit the standard philosophical affiliation (Neoplatonic/Neopythagoric) ascribed to Philip-Philagathos' ἐρμηνεία. The analysis is focused on three interrelated aspects: the rhetorical method, the compositional technique and the method of scriptural exegesis. After introducing the editions and the chronology of the homilies, I discussed in the **Introduction** the historical context which circumscribes Philagathos' activity.

Part I begins with discussing the emphasis on depicting emotions in Philagathos' *Homilies* by drawing on Henry Maguire's characterization of the Byzantine homily as a rhetorical form concentrated on the display of emotions or as 'an internal drama.' The analysis took its starting point from the constitutive Christian notion of incarnational *economy* as conveyed by Philagathos. Mirroring the Byzantine theological tradition, the homilist portrayed Christ as teaching the proper display of emotions. For Christ played out completely the drama of human suffering by submitting to human emotions and at last to death itself, curing by this the frailty of human condition and its liability to passions. Philagathos used many rhetorical techniques for making the audience experience the reality of the events narrated in the Gospel as were dialogue and monologue. Examples include Christ's conversation with the Widow of Nain, the dialogue with the sick man paralysed for thirty-eight years, Peter's monologue when witnessing the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, or the conversation with Mary Magdalene and Peter after the Resurrection. The analysis revealed the homilist's extensive usage of the Late-antique novels, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe* and *Clitophon* and Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, for describing miracles stories, various episodes surrounding the Resurrection of the Lord or the emotions experienced by the characters of the sacred story. For instance, I indicate that the great recognition scene in the *Aethiopika* is grafted onto the episode of Mary Magdalene's conversing with Jesus. For Magdalene's bewilderment at the tomb is modelled after the astonishment which seized the Ethiopian queen Persinna when Charikleia produced forth the crucial recognition-token of her royal identity. In another sermon, for depicting the emotions of fear and grief which vanquished the Apostles after the Passion, Philagathos appealed to Heliodorus' description of Charikleia's grief aroused by the capture of her beloved Theagenes. Philagathos found the novels instrumental for conveying the momentary human reactions or the emotional shifts undergone by the characters of the sacred story. The description of Herod's emotions when he was rebuked by St. John the Baptist over his unlawful liaison with her brother's wife Herodias or the description of Peter's emotions experienced at the Transfiguration of Christ are both based on an episode from Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe* and *Clitophon*, which features the paradoxical emotional reaction of Melite described as the coincidence of conflicting feelings (i.e. shame, love, anger and jealousy). For depicting the emotional confusion experienced by two disciples while they were walking on the road to Emmaus, Philagathos appealed to the final sequence of Heliodorus' novel which presents the whole crowd caught up in contradictory feelings (i.e. joy and grief, tears and laughter) at the recognition of Charikleia and Theagenes.

Part II is dedicated to Philagathos' usage of the rhetorical techniques of *threnos* (lament), *ekphrasis* (description), *diegesis* (narration), *synkrisis* (comparison) and *antithesis* (contrast). These techniques constitute an integral part to the underlying Christian message of the sermons serving a twofold purpose: to instruct the listeners and to stir them emotionally. First, I have approached Philagathos' handling of rhetorical lament by analysing the sermon "On the Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain" (Part II. 1). In this sermon, the preacher's ability to evoke the absent scene of the miracle reaches *virtuoso* levels. It encloses descriptions of a wide range of emotions, from excessive displays of sorrow to astonishment and great happiness. The spectators shedding of tears testify for the effectiveness of Philagathos' speech. When observing the panorama of rhetorical models employed, the artistry of this composition becomes all the more apparent. In its first part, the lament encloses an extensive nominal citation from Gregory of Nyssa's *De opificio hominis*. Then, for his own account Philagathos retrieves vivid imagery from Basil of Caesarea's *Homily on Psalm 44*, Gregory of Nyssa's *Sermons on the Beatitudes* and *Life of Saint Macrina*, Gregory of Nazianzus' *In praise of the Maccabees (oration 15)*, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, Procopius of Gaza's lost *Monody for Antioch*, from the *Life and Miracles of St. Nicholas of Myra*, and perhaps from Pseudo-Nilus of Ancyra's *Narrations*. Suggestive for Philagathos' method is the degree of precision in weaving into the text of the sermon passages on the same subject culled from such a multitude of sources.

In **Part II.2** is analysed Philagathos' extensive application of *ekphrasis* in the *Homilies*. Besides describing buildings or works of art as is the *ekphrasis* of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, the *ekphrasis* of the ceiling of the church of St. Mary of Patir (Rossano, Calabria) or the *ekphrasis* of a painting of the massacre of the Holy Innocents, the homilist used this rhetorical technique for picturing Salome's licentious dancing, for ridiculing a sleeping deacon, for picturing a man enraged, for rendering the tumult of a storm, etc. The analysis paid close attention to the rhetorical models informing these compositions. For Salome's licentious dancing the investigation revealed that the homilist incorporated vignettes culled from Basil of Caesarea's *Homily on the Martyr Gordius*, Gregory of Nyssa's *Eulogy of Saint Basil*, Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Lucian of Samosata's *Toxaris*, Alciphron's *Letters* as well as two references to Iliad and Odyssey. The *ekphrasis* of a deacon caught sleeping during the exposition of the doctrine is a close adaptation from Procopius of Gaza's *ekphrasis* of a painting featuring Phaedra and Hippolytus. For depicting storms, the homilist amassed passages from a multitude of authors. Identified snippets come from Alciphron's *Letters*, Gregory the Presbyter's *Life of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, the *Monogenes* of Makarios Magnes, Lucian's *Toxaris* and Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*.

Then, **Part II.3** is devoted to Philagathos' rendition of narrative episodes by looking at three different narrations: the story of Jephthah who sacrificed his only daughter when returning victorious from war, the story of Tamar who disguised herself as a prostitute for seducing Judah and the story about Theodora, the wife of the iconoclast emperor Theophilus and Denderis, the imperial court jester who witnessed the empress venerating holy icons and divulged the event to the emperor. I pointed out that Philagathos selected these stories on account of their evocative and emotional content, which he thought fit to 'upgrade' with vivid imagery derived from different sources. For the story Jephthah, Philagathos turned to Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*. The description of Jephthah's daughter coming to greet her father is

fashioned after the passionate embrace between Charikleia and Theagenes. As for the theological meaning of the story, Philagathos appropriated Gregory of Nyssa's account of Abraham and Isaac from Nyssen's *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*. However, the peak of Philagathos' narrative technique is encapsulated by his vivid rendition of the story of Tamar. For achieving a dramatic representation, Philagathos embroidered passages and vignettes from Procopius of Gaza's lost *Monody for Antioch*, from Alciphron's letters and perhaps from Choricus of Gaza's *Opus* 29. For specifying Tamar's arts of seduction, Philagathos retrieved the episode of Thisbe seducing Knemon from Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*. Similarly, the rendition of the story about Theodora and Denderis is again significant. For the homilist recasts a negative account of self reflection and mirror gazing based on Skylitzes' *Synopsis historiōn* into a positive affirmation of iconic theology.

Next, in **Part II.4** is presented the centrality of *synkrisis* and *antithesis* in Philagathos' *Homilies*. For Byzantine homiletics, as Henri Maguire pointed out, *synkrisis* and *antithesis* are more than just rhetorical devices. These techniques represent a hermeneutical tool which defines the so-called 'Byzantine habit of thinking in pairs.' There are sermons entirely structured around *synkrisis*, as the homily "For the third Sunday of Lent" which encloses an original and extensive comparison between Peter and Moses mostly based on Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of perpetual progress. As in much Byzantine theological literature the preacher resorted to antithetical thought for elucidating Mary's role in the history of salvation, the paradoxical aspects of Christ's Resurrection or for interpreting the miracle stories from the Scripture. Thus, in *hom.* 78 Philagathos presents an original juxtaposition of Christ's virginal birth with his Resurrection from the sealed tomb and the subsequent apparition through the closed doors. Another example features the juxtaposition of the Virgin as Theotokos (Birthgiver of God) with the image of the unconsumed burning bush of Genesis in *hom.* 25. The parallel between God's incarnation and the bush being burnt without being consumed is traditional in Byzantine literature. Notwithstanding, Philagathos fashioned the comparison from an original perspective by drawing on Achilles Tatius' description of the mystic fire of Aphrodite which spares the object of its flames despite furiously burning.

Part III is devoted to the compositional technique of Philagathos' sermons being argued that the structure of the *Homilies* evokes the so-called Byzantine 'florilegic habit' or "culture of collection" (*cultura della syllogé*) as Paolo Odorico contended. The analysis of Philagathos' usage of rhetorical techniques already made manifest the preacher's proclivity for amassing passages about various emotions (i.e. deep grief, mourning, seduction, love), works of art, descriptions of storms, of persons, of events from various sources which he retrieved in the appropriate homiletic contexts. Besides, it appears that Philagathos' method of citation and practice of reading was structured around general (theological) themes. In this sense he gathered up passages and snippets about human nature, death, pleasure, which he frequently retrieved in different sermons. For instance, for the subject of death and mourning discussed in *hom.* 34 the homilist collected and embroidered passages from Gregory of Nyssa's *De mortuis oratio*, Aeneas of Gaza's *Theophrastus*, Makarios Magnes' *Monogenes*, Michael Psellos' *Oration 4*. Similarly, for describing the human nature and Christ's incarnational economy, Philagathos excerpted passages from Gregory of Nyssa's writings, Gregory of Nazianzus' orations, Michael Psellos' theological commentaries, Aeneas of Gaza's *Theophrastus* and the *Monogenes* of Makarios Magnes. I have indicated that there are homilies made up almost entirely of citations with fragments collected from sources thematically linked with the subject of the sermons.

Furthermore, the same ‘florilegic habit’ often stands behind Philagathos’ scriptural citations. In particular, the numerous citations from the *Song of Songs* and from the *Minor Prophets* depend on their correlative contexts in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Homilies on the Song of Songs* and Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*.

Overall, the analysis revealed that Philagathos’ florilegic habit works at every level of exegesis. At the rhetorical level, the homilist amassed passages for achieving vividness and persuasion. A case in point is the piercing description of Lazarus’ rotting body for which the homilist appropriated passages from Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Making of Man* and *The Life of Moses* and Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*. The same florilegic habit accounts for the usage of scientific explanatory remarks for interpreting difficult passages, natural phenomena, objects that turn up in the commentary of the Gospel pericopes. Such were the homilist’s inquires into the attributes of the mustard seed, the mandrake, the sykamore, the pods that the swine ate, the anatomy of the eye, the peculiarities of snakes or the elucidation of lightning. Similarly, the citation of scriptural ἀπορίαι, of various ζητήματα is determined by the homilist’s strategy of collecting passages about the Gospel text under scrutiny. Most indicative for Philagathos’ florilegic habit is the plethora of sources exploited in the *Homilies*. Foremost stand the writings of Gregory of Nyssa which the homilist lavishly used for his own rhetorical elaborations, for scientific lore, for spiritual and mystical interpretations. A vast thematic usage of Nyssen’s works with excerpts indexed and allocated to the appropriate sermons is visible throughout the thesis. The patristic authorities most often cited by name are Gregory the Theologian and Maximus Confessor. The former is most often cited in small snippets that illustrate important theological doctrines. Maximus on the other hand is seminal for Philagathos’ allegorical exegesis. Another significant source previously undocumented in the *Homilies* is Michael Psellos. In the homily “On the Sending Forth of the Twelve Disciples,” Philagathos’ extensive appropriation even favours a limited restoration of Psellos’ *Opusculum* 76, a text defectively transmitted. Then, Cyril of Alexandria’s *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets* and the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* feature prominently in the sermons. Further, Philagathos cited and used various works of Basil of Caesarea. Special mention should be given to Basil’s spurious work *Enarratio in prophetam Isaiam*. In addition, Philagathos quoted by name John Chrysostom, Epiphanius of Salamis, John the Ladder, John of Damascus and Symeon Metaphrastes. Besides these luminaries, the homilist drew on Aeneas of Gaza, Antionchus the Monk, Nylus of Ancyra, Proclus of Constantinople, Makarios Magnes, sources hitherto unknown to have been used in the *Homilies*. Trying to account for Philagathos’ handling of his sources one may suppose that he compiled a private florilegium of citations to which the author turned for illustrating his compositions, as Elizabeth Jeffreys suggested for the homilies and letters of Iakovos the Monk. Indeed, the multitude of exegetic contexts that stamp simultaneously Philagathos’ compositions may involve a thematic florilegium.

In **Part IV** is explored the first level of Philagathos’ theological exegesis: the exposition according to the ‘literal/historical sense.’ Foremost, the analysis includes an extensive discussion of Philagathos’ dealing with various scripture-related discrepancies, contradictions, difficulties that questioned and subverted the ‘literal meaning’ of the Gospels. Perhaps the most significant finding is Philagathos’ substantial usage of Makarios Magnes’ *Monogenes* (**Part IV.1**). In fact, it turned out that the *Monogenes* is one of Philagathos’ major sources. Besides collecting scriptural ἀπορίαι the homilist exploited Makarios Magnes’ treatise for adorning his sermons with various vivid illustrations. Furthermore, I have shown that Philagathos used the

late-antique treatise for framing theological doctrines as well. An example discussed was Makarios' argument pertaining to Christ's nature inferred from the grammatical analysis applied to Peter's saying: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 15:16). **Part IV.2** continues with the examination of Philagathos' citations from Emperor Julian's *Contra Galilaeos* by taking into account the larger spectrum of the Late-antique anti-Christian polemics. Significantly, Philagathos' testimony permits us to further map the textual relations between the chief ancient repositories of anti-Christian arguments (i.e. between Julian's *Contra Galilaeos*, Porphyry's *Contra Christianos* and the *Monogenes* of Makarios Magnes). When trying to assess Philagathos' sources of pagan reprimands the fact that the homilist used the same Christian refutation that stands behind Theophylact of Ochrid's citations of Julian's *Contra Galilaeos*, as Stefano Trovato pointed out, becomes particularly valuable. For it points out that behind the homilist's references to anti-Christian arguments often stands a (lost) Christian confutation wherefrom the homilist appropriated the pagan points together with their rebuttal. In **Part IV.3** is highlighted the plethora of scriptural related difficulties cited by Philagathos as originating in the writings of the Late-antique polemicists. Although not nominally ascribing the authorship to a pagan opponent, the type and the stylistic of the critique cited by Philagathos points to the Late-antique dossiers of anti-Christian reprimands. Philagathos' interest in solving exegetic difficulties is further documented in **Part IV.4** in relation to the references made to the New Testament *Apocrypha*. Then, the homilist's reliance on the genre of *quaestiones et responsiones* is considered in **Part IV.5**. The analysis pointed out that the queries scattered throughout the *Homilies* as those about the genealogy of Jesus, the Lord's Passion, the Resurrection narratives, the Transfiguration of the Lord referred to with the technical title of ζητήματα καὶ λύσεις are typical of the *quaestiones et responsiones* genre. Then, in **Part IV.6** is documented the homilist's practice of amassing scriptural queries from reputed Christian commentators as well. The analysis featured examples involving authors like Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Maximus Confessor and Michael Psellos. Next, the investigation brought to the fore the traditional approaches centred on philological and grammatical analysis involved in Philagathos' literal exegesis (**Part IV.7–8**). The analysis evidenced the homilist's delight in explaining curious or foreign words, issues in human anatomy or physical phenomena as the explanation of 'lightning' derived from the Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, *De mundo*. In this connection is discussed Philagathos' medical explanation of demonic possession by means of the four humours theory, which he derived from Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Making of Man* and Makarios Magnes' *Monogenes*. In similar fashion, for explaining the likeness of the Kingdom of God with a mustard seed, Philagathos turns to Makarios Magnes' description of the curative properties of mustard. As I have argued, these variegated approaches to the literal sense are subsumed to a florilegic perspective.

The final section devoted to Philagathos' exegesis in the *Homilies* (**Part V**) approaches the spiritual level of interpretation (θεωρία). First, the analysis situates the South Italian preacher within the Alexandrian exegetical tradition, for which the spiritual exegesis subsumed typological, allegorical, moral and anagogical modes of interpretation. For Philagathos, as for Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor, the spiritual exegesis discloses spiritual realities with the goal of opening up the listeners' desire for ascent and virtuous life. The analysis underscored the importance of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor for Philagathos' spiritual exegesis. Second, the analysis highlighted a distinctive feature of Philagathos' homiletic style represented by the systematic recourse to etymology and arithmology (**Part**

V.1). By collecting explanations from various sources related to almost all the names and numbers that surfaced in the Gospel lections the homilist affirmed his florilegic stance. There are 57 instances when etymologies of names were employed and 29 instances of numbers. Indisputably, Philagathos' application of etymological and numerical speculations for deriving spiritual meanings brings to light a consummate exegetic technique frequently inspired from Maximus' exegesis. In fact, Philagathos' profound assimilation of Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor's thought with reference to the doctrine of perpetual progress is investigated in **Part V.2**. This doctrine of progress or straining (ἐπέκτασις) toward the infinite God originates in Gregory of Nyssa's theological anthropology elaborated in relation with the notion of divine infinity. Maximus Confessor later modified it in the context of refuting Origenism. Philagathos applies this doctrine to the scriptural episode about Martha and Mary (*hom.* 32), to the episode of Martha's encounter with the resurrected Christ (*hom.* 49), for interpreting the apparition of the Lord on the road to Emmaus (*hom.* 75) or for exploring the meaning of Mark 8:34 ("Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself") in *hom.* 46.

All these features of Philagathos' exegesis unfold conspicuously in his allegorical reading of the *Aethiopika*, which constitutes the last part of the present dissertation (**Part VI**). At variance with the thesis that ascribes the commentary to the Neoplatonic tradition of interpretation, I have shown that Philip-Philagathos' spiritual reading of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika* is firmly grounded in Maximus Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa's exegetic principles. In particular, the investigation argued that the etymological and numerical speculations displayed in the ἐρμηνεία reflect Maximus Confessor's exegesis whereas Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of spiritual progress from the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* and *The Life of Moses* is reflected in Philagathos reading of the novel as an allegory of the soul yearning for unity with the divine. Overall, when considering Philagathos' spiritual reading of Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, the striking influence that the novel exerted upon the *Homilies* acquires new intelligibility and prominence. It appears thus certified that Philagathos' *Homilies* correspond to the more general tendency of twelfth-century Byzantine literature of interest and experimentation with the novelistic genre. In fact, the examination of Philagathos' rhetorical models exposed his rigorous consonance with the contemporary Byzantine rhetorical taste. For, Heliodorus, Achilles Tatius, Lucian, Alciphron and Synesius were the authors recommended by Gregory of Corinth in his the handbook of style, *On the Composition of Speeches*.

To conclude, the analysis of Philagathos' œuvre sheds more light on the religious and cultural context of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and offers an answer to the enduring popularity of this homiletic corpus in the Byzantine world. For his achievement derives from the harmonious blending of rhetorical refinement and scientific lore with mystical interpretations and didactic clarifications of scriptural issues.

Curriculum Vitae

Studies

- 2018 PhD program in Medieval Studies, Central European University (Budapest, Hungary); supervisor: Floris Bernard
- 2007 MA in Medieval Studies, Central European University (Budapest, Hungary)
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- 2013 Summer Fellowship, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection
- 2011 Doctoral Research Support Grant, Central European University, Università degli Studi di Bari 'Aldo Moro'

Conference papers relevant to the dissertation

- 2017 "Norman Italy and the Byzantine 'Encyclopedic' Landscape: The *Homilies* of Philagathos of Cerami. International conference: *The Normans in the South: Mediterranean Meetings in the Central Middle Ages*. St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford (30 June – Sunday 2 July 2017).
- 2011 "The Greek Monastic Renewal in the Twelfth-Century Norman Kingdom: Preaching and Pedagogical Discourses in the Works of Philagathos of Cerami." University of Sofia 'St.Kliment Ohridski', 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies (22–29 August, 2011).
- 2009 "Competing Monastic Traditions in Sicily: Roger II (1130–1154), Benedictines and the Foundation of the Monastery of San Salvatore in Messina (1131)." Interdisciplinary workshop on *Benedictine Monasticism and Religious Houses in Central Europe—Monks and Nuns, Monasteries and Canonesses Houses*. (Göttingen, 4–6 October 2009).

Selection of works published related to the topic of the dissertation

- "Philagathos of Cerami and the Monastic Renewal in the Twelfth-Century Norman Kingdom: Preaching and Persuasion." *La tradizione dei testi greci in Italia meridionale*, ed. Nunzio Bianchi, Bari: Edipuglia, 2011, 53–63.
- "Allegorizing Love in Twelfth Century Sicily: Philagathos of Cerami, Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* and the Christian Tradition." *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 14 (2008): 47–65.